

Documents on Diplomacy: Resources

The "Four Freedoms" in Art

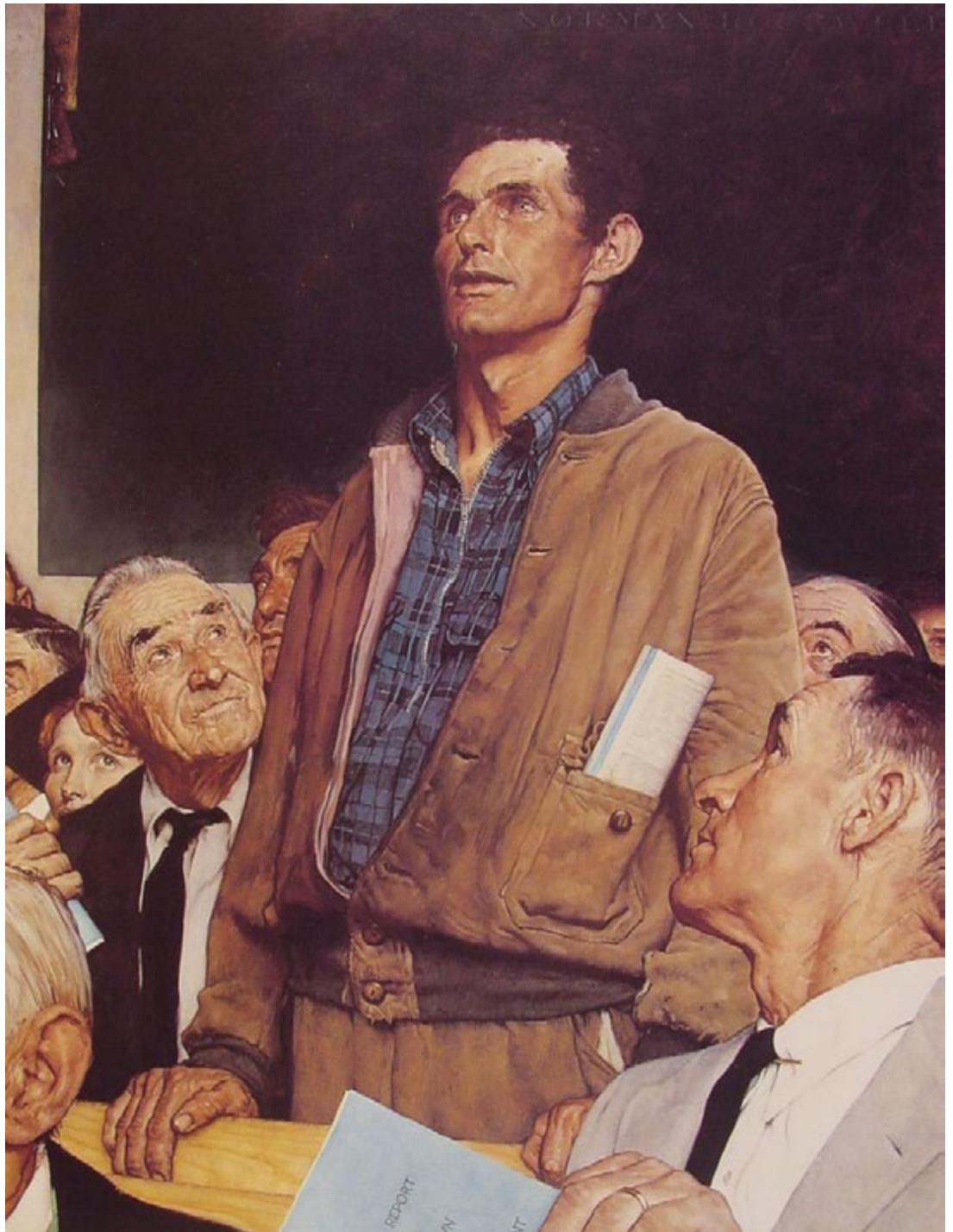
FREEDOM OF SPEECH

In 1943, Norman Rockwell was too old to join the war effort so he decided to interpret FDR's famous 1941 address to Congress on the four freedoms. Roosevelt spoke of ideals for the world, and Rockwell showed these ideals as applied to the United States. Here he captured "grass roots democracy" at work in a town meeting.

The artist makes the speaker a heroic figure, with worn clothing exemplifying a "badge of honor." The townspeople listen with respect, and it may well be that this meeting is occurring in the very classroom (note the blackboard) where the speaker learned the ideals of America.

The paintings first appeared in a supplement to the *Saturday Evening Post*, a magazine for which Rockwell did hundreds of covers. Later the Office of War Information reproduced the paintings by the hundreds of thousands, even "dropping copies into the European war front."

This painting was Rockwell's favorite of the four. He donated a smaller version to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

Rockwell's interpretations of FDR's ideals were eventually exhibited all over the country during World War II. These showings were instrumental in selling hundreds of thousands of war bonds to support the American effort and they embodied American patriotism more than high art. All four display ideal virtues with a minimum of fuss in the artwork.

In "Freedom of Worship," people of different faiths are in the act of pray. With little depth of image and sepia and monochromatic tones, the heads and hands fill the canvas.

Although Rockwell included the statement at the top, the picture clearly speaks for itself.



FREEDOM FROM WANT

Grandma and Grandpa host a family dinner and the visual devices here—from the smiling faces to the table settings and sunlight on the dinnerware—conveys the full meaning. This might be Thanksgiving and the turkey echoes Benjamin Franklin's choice of national bird—even though he lost out to an Eagle. Note as well that this abundance was shown in the painting during a wartime rationing. Understanding that point, makes the painting even more powerful.



FREEDOM FROM FEAR

This painting is considered the most effective of all four because it is so simple and so every day. It is a most ordinary depiction of parents putting children to bed, but note the newspaper headline. Is Rockwell saying that our freedom is most valuable when we are able to take it for granted? He takes an ordinary domestic moment to convey a universal message.

Is there any way to depict freedom from fear more gently than this?



Reference: *102 Favorite Paintings by Norman Rockwell*,
Introduction by Christopher
Finch.
Crown Publishers. 1978